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AYYAPPAN DEVA

GOD OF SELF CONTROL

LORD AYYAPPA OF SABARIMALA OR DHARMA SAASTHA AS IS UNIVERSALLY CALLED HAS A NUMBER OF HISTORICAL STORIES ABOUT HIM WHICH HIS DEVOTEES HEARD FROM THEIR ANCESTORS OR GURU. THE STORIES ABOUT LORD DHARMA SAASTHA IS ALSO MENTIONED IN VEDAS AND PURANAS. HOWEVER DIFFERENT STORIES ARE PREVALENT IN DIFFERENT AREAS , DEPENDING UPON THE LOCALITY AND PLACES.

LORD VISHNU'S "MOHINI VESHAM" IS A WELL KNOWN STORY. AFTER THE DEATH OF MAHISHASURA, HIS SISTER MAHISHI TOOK A DECISION TO TAKE REVENGE AGAINST ALL DEVAS. HENCE SHE STARTED DHYANAM(MEDITATION) TO PLEASE LORD BRAHMA. IMPRESSED BY HER BHAKTI, BRAHMA MADE AN APPEARANCE AND GRANTED HER WISH THAT, NOBODY IN THE UNIVERSE COULD KILL HER EXCEPT THE SON OF LORD SHIVA AND VISHNU.

WITH THIS BOON, SHE FELT SO POWERFUL THAT SHE STARTED HARASSING DEVENDRAN AND THE DEVAS. THE DEVAS PRAYED TO LORD VISHNU AND LORD SHIVA. THE VENERABLE GODS SENT THEIR SHAKTI & SPIRIT TOGETHER TO THE EARTH IN THE FORM OF A MAHISHAM. THERE UPON THE MAHISHI ALONG WITH MAHISHAM LEFT HEAVEN FOR EARTH AND STARTED IN A JUNGLE.

ONE DAY LORD SHIVA REQUESTED LORD VISHNU TO SHOW THE MOHINI VESHAM ONCE MORE. AS THE MOHINI APPEARED IN FRONT OF LORD SHIVA, KAMADEVA SENT HIS ARROW AT LORD SHIVA AND THUS THE DISASTER BEGAN FOR MAHISHI. A MALE CHILD WAS BORN (UTHRAM STAR, WENDESDAY) FROM THE THIGH OF LORD VISHNU. THE CHILD WAS BORN WITH A BELL IN HIS NECK AND SO HE WAS NAMED AS MANIKANDAN (THE ONE WHO WAS BORN WITH A BELL IN HIS NECK). LORD SHIVA TOOK HIM TO KAILASAM. THE BOY LEARNT ALL MANTRA AND TANTHRA UNDER THE TUTELAGE LIVING OF LORD SHIVA AND BECAME A GOOD WARRIOR. AT THE AGE OF 12, MANIKANDAN WAS TOLD ABOUT HIS MISSION OF LIFE AND SENT TO EARTH AS A CHILD.

RAJA RAJASEKHARAN WAS THE KING OF PANTHALAM, A SMALL PLACE IN SOUTHERN KERALA. HE WAS AN ARDENT DEVOTEE OF LORD SHIVA AND HIS QUEEN THAT OF LORD VISHNU. THEY WERE CHILDLESS. THEY PRAYED TO GOD CEASELESSLY FOR A CHILD.

ONE DAY AFTER HUNTING, WHILE TAKING REST AT THE BANK OF RIVER PUMBA , THE RAJA HEARD A CHILD'S CRY. WHEN HE WENT FOR A SEARCH WITH HIS COMPANIONS HE FOUND A CHILD ALONE IN THE FOREST. IMMEDIATELY A SAINT APPEARED AND TOLD THE KING TO TAKE THE CHILD TO HIS PALACE AND CALL HIM MANIKANDAN.

THE KING AND QUEEN WERE VERY HAPPY AND THEY BROUGHT UP THE CHILD AS THEIR OWN. AFTER THREE YEARS, THE QUEEN GAVE BIRTH TO A SON AND NAMED HIM RAJA RAJA. MANIKANDAN WAS SENT TO RAJA GURU FOR LEARNING. MANIKANDAN COMPLETED HIS STUDIES QUICKLY AND BECAME EXPERT IN ALL FIELDS. WHEN THE TIME FOR LEAVING THE GURUKUL CAME, MANIKANDAN WANTED TO GIVE DAKSHINA TO HIS GURU. THE GURU THEN TOLD MANIKANDAN TO CURE HIS SON FROM BLINDNESS. AS SOON AS MANIKANDAN RUBBED HIS HANDS OVER THE EYE OF THE BOY, HIS VISION WAS RESTORED. THE GURU THEN TOLD MANIKANDAN THAT ONE DAY HE WOULD BECOME LORD OF THE UNIVERSE. MANIKANDAN REQUESTED THE GURU TO KEEP IT AS A SECRET AND LEFT THE GURUKUL.

THE PANTHALAM KINGDOM WAS ONE OF THE SMALLEST KINGDOM, BUT IT WAS RICH. THERE WERE FREQUENT ATTACKS FROM OTHER KINGDOMS AS WELL AS PERSIAN COUNTRIES. THE DIWAN WAS NOT LOYAL TO THE KING. AFTER HIS RETURN FROM THE GURUKUL, MANIKANDAN TOOK KEEN INTEREST IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE KINGDOM . HE PUT AN END TO THE INTERNAL FIGHT AMONG THE WARRING KINGDOMS AND RESTORED LAW AND ORDER IN THE KINGDOM.

ONE DAY A MUSLIM INVADER BY NAME VAVAR REACHED THE COASTAL AREA OF PANTHALAM TO ATTACK THE KINGDOM. SEEING THE HELPLESS SITUATION OF THE KING, MANIKANDAN INSISTED ON GOING ALONE FOR THE BATTLE WITH VAVAR. AFTER MUCH PERSUASION, THE KING ACCEDED TO MANIKANDAN'S WISH.

MANIKANDAN WITH HIS DIVINE POWER TEMPORARILY CLOSED THE EYES OF VAVAR WHO COULD SEE ONLY MANIKANDAN. REALISING THE DIVINE POWER VAVAR BECAME HIS ARDENT AND CLOSEST BELIEVER. THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF A FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIONS AND REGIONS. IT WAS A PROOF THAT CASTE, RELIGION OR REGION WERE NOT BARRIERS FOR A GOOD FRIENDSHIP AND THAT HUMANITY IS ABOVE ALL. THE MUTUAL RESPECT AND LOVE THEY SHARED HELPED THEM TO OVERCOME ALL DIFFICULTIES.

RAJA STARTED THINKING OF MAKING MANIKANDAN AS THE NEXT KING. THE MINISTER DID NOT LIKE THIS AND TOOK SEVERAL STEPS TO KILL MANIKANDAN . THE MINISTER FAILED IN HIS ATTEMPTS BECAUSE OF THE DIVINE POWER OF MANIKANDAN AND TIMELY INTERVENTION OF LORD SHIVA.

THE MINISTER THEN PERSUADED THE QUEEN TO MAKE HER OWN SON THE NEXT KING. PERSUADED BY THE MINISTER, THE QUEEN CREATED A DRAMA OF SUFFERING FROM SEVERE HEADACHE AND THE KING, BELIEVING THIS, CALLED THE DIWAN TO BRING IN THE BEST PHYSICIANS TO TREAT HER. THE PHYSICIAN, BROUGHT BY THE DIWAN EXAMINED THE QUEEN AND TOLD THE KING THAT THE QUEEN HAD BEEN SUFFERING FROM A DANGEROUS DISEASE AND IT COULD BE CURED ONLY BY APPLYING TIGRESS' MILK. THE KING SENT SEVERAL OF HIS MEN TO THE FOREST FOR BRINGING THIS MILK. THE KING UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WAS AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK AND WANTED HIS DEAR QUEEN TO BE CURED AT ANY COST AND OFFERED HALF OF HIS KINGDOM TO ANYBODY WHO BROUGHT THE MILK.

MANIKANDAN WANTED TO GO AND FETCH TIGRESS' MILK BUT WAS REFUSED PERMISSION BY THE KING AS HE WAS VERY YOUNG TO GO TO THE FOREST AND THAT HE WAS TO BE CROWNED. UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION MANIKANDAN REQUESTED THE KING FOR A PROMISE TO DO SOMETHING HE WANTED. THE KING GAVE THE PROMISE AND MANIKANDAN ASKED FOR PERMISSION TO GO TO THE FOREST. DISAPPOINTED THAT HE WAS TRICKED THE KING HAD NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE BUT TO SEND MANIKANDAN TO THE FOREST.

KING RAJASEKHARA MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO SEND A GROUP OF HIS LOYAL MEN ALONG WITH MANIKANDAN, WHICH HOWEVER WAS REFUSED BY MANIKANDAN ON THE GROUND THAT THE TIGRESS MIGHT RUN AWAY SEEING THE CROWD OF SOLDIERS. KING RAJASEKHARA SENT ALONGWITH MANIKANDAN NECESSARY FOODSTUFFS AND COCONUTS WITH THREE EYES, IN REMEMBRANCE OF LORD SHIVA.

IN THE MEANTIME MAHISHI WAS ENJOYING LIFE ALONG WITH MAHISHAM. HOWEVER WITHIN A FEW DAYS, MAHISHI COULD GUESSING THE PLAN OF LORD VISHNU AND LORD SHIVA ABANDONED THE MAHISHAM AND WENT TO DEVALOK AND AGAIN STARTED ATTACKING DEVAS. DEVENDRA AND OTHERS HAD TO RUN AWAY TO SEEK THE HELP OF LORD SHIVA, WHO PROMISED THE EARLY END OF MAHISHI.

IN THE FOREST MANIKANDAN WAS WELCOMED BY THE VAVAR AND PANCHBUTHA OF LORD SHIVA. ON HIS WAY SEEING THE ATROCITIES OF MAHISHI IN THE DEVALOKA, HE WENT THERE AND IN THE BATTLE BETWEEN THEM, MAHISHI WAS PUSHED BY MANIKANDAN INTO THE EARTH, WHERE SHE FELL ON THE BANKS OF AZHUTHA RIVER. MANIKANDAN CLASHED WITH HER THERE. AT THE END OF THE BATTLE BETWEEN MAHISHI AND MANIKANDAN AT AZHUTHA RIVER BANKS, MANIKANDAN CLIMBED UP HER CHEST AND DANCED VIOLENTLY. THE IMPACT OF HIS DANCE WAS FELT IN THE EARTH AND DEVLOKA AND THE DEVAS WERE AFRAID. MAHISHI KNOWING THAT THE DIVINE POWER DANCING ON HER BODY WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE SON OF HARI AND HARAN, PROSTRATED BEFORE MANIKANDAN AND DIED. THIS DANCE WAS WITNESSED BY LORD SHIVA AND MAHAVISHNU FROM A PLACE CALLED KALAKATTI . A DIVINE LADY (LEELA DAUGHTER OF KARABAN) CAME OUT OF THE BODY OF MAHISHI AND REQUESTED MANIKANDAN TO CONSIDER HER AS HIS SHAKTI. MANIKANDAN EXPRESSED HIS INABILITY TO ACCEPT HER AS HIS WIFE AS HE HAS TAKEN BRAHMCHARYA FOR WELFARE OF THE UNIVERSE. HE OFFERED A SUITABLE PLACE NEAR HIS TEMPLE AND NAMED HER AS MALIKAPURATHAMMA.

MANIKANDAN VISITED ONE OF HIS OLD DEVOTEES "SABARI" AND GAVE SALVATION TO HER SOUL. HE ALSO AGREED THE SABARI'S REQUEST TO REMAIN IN SABARIMALA FOR THE WELFARE OF THE UNIVERSE.

THEN LORD SHIVA APPEARED BEFORE MANIKANDAN AND TOLD HIM THAT THOUGH HE HAD DONE GOOD FOR THE DEVAS, STILL THERE WAS ONE MAIN TASK AND THAT WAS TO GIVE COMFORT TO THE KING RAJASEKHARA WHO WAS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT HIM AND ALSO TO CURE THE QUEEN'S AILMENT. LORD SHIVA FURTHER TOLD HIM THAT HE COULD GO TO THE PALACE WITH THE TIGRESSES AND LORD INDRAN WOULD HELP HIM. AS STATED BY LORD SHIVA, ALL FEMALE DEVAS IN THE DISGUISE OF TIGRESSES AND MALE DEVAS AS TIGERS WITH LORD DEVENDRAN AS THE TIGER ON WHOM MANIKANDAN RODE, STARTED THEIR JOURNEY TO THE PALACE.

WHEN MANIKANDAN APPROACHED THE PALACE WITH THE TIGERS AND TIGRESSES, THE PEOPLE WHO RIDICULED HIM WHEN HE STARTED HIS JOURNEY TO THE FOREST WHETHER HE WANTED TOY TIGRESSES, REALLY GOT PANICKY SEEING THE VIOLENT BUNCH OF ANIMALS AND STARTED RUNNING HELTER SKELTER.

THE SANYASI WHO APPEARED AT THE FOREST AT THE TIME OF KING RAJASEKHARA'S VISIT THERE WHEN HE HEARD A CHILD'S CRIES, AGAIN APPEARED AT THE PALACE AND TOLD KING RAJASEKHARA THE IDENTITY OF MANIKANDAN. HEARING THIS, THE KING STOOD IN GREAT SURPRISE AND SILENCE. HE STOOD NON PLUSED AS HE SAW MANIKANDAN RIDING A TIGER AND PEOPLE RUNNING AWAY. SEEING THE KING, MANIKANDAN DESCENDED FROM THE TIGER'S BACK AND TOLD HIM THAT SINCE THE TIGRESSES WERE THERE, HE COULD GET THE QUEEN CURED WITH THEIR MILK. KING RAJASEKHARA, FELL AT HIS FEET AND BEGGED TO FORGIVE FOR WHATEVER HAPPENED WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE, AND ASKED HIM TO SEND BACK THE TIGERS AS THE QUEENS AILMENT HAD BEEN CURED THE MOMENT MANIKANDAN WENT TO THE FOREST.

KING RAJASEKHARA TOLD MANIKANDAN THAT THE DIWAN WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THESE THINGS AND HENCE HE SHOULD BE PUNISHED. HOWEVER, MANIKANDAN TOLD THE KING THAT HE NEED NOT PUNISH THE DIWAN AND ALL HAD HAPPENED ONLY THROUGH THE WILL OF GOD. HE ALSO GAVE NECESSARY ADVICE TO RAJA FOR THE SALVATION OF SOUL (WHICH IS KNOWN AS BOOTHANATHA GEETHA). AFTER GIVING NECESSARY GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF TEMPLE AT SABARIMALA LORD AYYAPPA (DHARMA SAASTHA) INFORMED RAJA, THAT HE IS GOING FOR MEDITATION AT PONNAMBALAMEDU FOR THE WELFARE OF THE UNIVERSE AND TO PROTECT DHARMA.

KING RAJASEKHARA WAS HEART BROKEN HEARING THIS AND IMPLORED AYYAPPA "I HAVE MADE ALL ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOUR CORONATION AND WHAT SHALL I DO WITH ALL THE ORNAMENTS WHICH WERE MADE FOR YOUR CORONATION CEREMONY?". TO THIS LORD AYYAPPA REPLIED "I AM ENTERING ETERNAL MEDITATION FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE WORLD. HOWEVER, EVERY YEAR AT THE TIME OF MAKARA SANKRANTHI, I WILL WAKE UP FROM MY MEDITATION AND OPEN MY EYES TO SEE THE WORLD. AT THAT TIME YOU MAY ADORN MY IDOL WITH ALL THE ORNAMENTS THAT YOU HAVE MADE FOR MY CORONATION CEREMONY AND MAKARA JYOTI WILL APPEAR IN THE PONNAMBALA MEDU. THE LORD THEN MERGED IN TO THE IDOL OF LORD DHARMA SAASTHA IN THE PONNAMLAMEDU FOR MEDITATION FOR THE WELFARE OF THE UNIVERSE AND TO PROTECT DHARMA .

AT THE ADVICE OF SAINT AGASTHYA, KING RAJASEKHARA LAID THE FOUNDATION STONE FOR THE BUILDING SHABARIMALA TEMPLE. BHAGWAN MANIKANDAN, HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE WOULD GRACE ONLY THOSE DEVOTEES WHO OFFER DHARSHAN AFTER PERFORMING VRITHAM FOR FORTYONE DAYS KEEPING THEMSELVES ISOLATED FROM FAMILY DESIRES AND TASTES AND LEADING A LIFE LIKE BRAHMACHARYAS, THINKING OF GOOD THINGS ALWAYS, AND THAT WHILE COMING FOR HIS DARSHAN, THEY SHALL ADORN THEMSELVES WITH THREE EYED COCONUT AND FOODSTUFF/AANTHA GARLAND IN THEIR HEADS, AS THE BHAGWAN DID WHEN HE WENT TO THE FOREST TO FETCH TIGRESS' MILK AND BATHE IN RIVER PAMBA RAISING SLOGANS OF SARANAM AND CLIMB THE EIGHTEEN STAIRS. AS GRACED BY THE BHAGWAN, KING RAJASEKHARA COMPLETED BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE WITH EIGHTEEN STAIRS TO REACH IT.

WHEN THE KING WAS THINKING HOW TO PUT DHARMASAASTHA'S FIGURE IN THE TEMPLE FOR DARSHAN TO DEVOTEES, HE RECALLED THE WORDS OF THE BHAGWAN, THE RIVER PAMBA WAS A HOLY RIVER AS RIVER GANGA, SABARIMALA WAS A HOLY PLACE AS KASI. DHARMASAASTHA SENT PARASURAMA TO SABARIMALA WHO CARVED THE FIGURE OF LORD AYYAPPA AND INSTALLED IT ON THE DAY OF MAKARASANKRANTHI. EVERY YEAR LAKHS AND LAKHS OF PEOPLE THRONG TO SABARIMALA IRRESPECTIVE OF CASTE OR CREED AND ADORN THEMSELVES WITH GARLANDS AND IRUMUDIS, CHANT SLOGANS ON LORD AYYAPPA, BATHE IN HOLY RIVER PAMBA, CLIMB UP THE EIGHTEEN STAIRS AND GET THE GRACE OF LORD AYYAPPA, THE DHARMASAASTHA.

THE JEWEL CASKET IS CARRIED ON HEAD FROM THE ANCESTRAL RESIDENCE OF THE ROYAL FAMILY OF PANTHALAM TO THE SHRINE ON THE DAY. A GARUDA, THE BRAHMAN KITE, FOLLOWS THIS ORNAMENTS CARRYING PROCESSION, HOVERING ABOUT IN THE SKY. AFTER THESE ORNAMENTS ARE ADORNED ON THE LORD, THE BIRD CIRCLES THE TEMPLE IN THE SKY THREE TIMES AND DISAPPEARS. EXCITED BY THIS SIGHT THE DEVOTEES BEGIN TO CHANT "SWAMIYE SARANAM AYYAPPA". A STAR (UTHRAM NAKSHATHRA) NEVER SEEN BEFORE IN THE SKY APPEARS ON THE DAY OF MAKARAJYOTHI DAY BEFORE THE SIGHTING OF THE JYOTHI. A JYOTHI IS SEEN FOR A LITTLE TIME ON THE HILLTOP SHOWING THE PRESENCE OF SWAMY AYYAPPA GRACING HIS DEVOTEES.